

**WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:**

1. A method for conducting electronic commerce over a network, comprising:

5 determining an inventory status of at least one product being considered for purchase by a buyer; and

informing the buyer of a change in the inventory status, wherein said informing precedes any purchase of the product by the buyer.

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2. The method of claim 1, wherein the inventory status comprises a level of availability of the product to be shipped to the buyer and the change in inventory status comprises a change in the level of availability of the product to be shipped to the buyer.

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3. The method of claim 1, wherein the inventory status comprises a probability of immediate shipment of the product upon purchase by the buyer and the change in the inventory status comprises a change in the probability of immediate shipment of the product upon purchase by the buyer.

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4. The method of claim 1, wherein said informing comprises informing the buyer that the product is nearing depletion in the inventory.

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5. The method of claim 1, wherein said informing further comprises informing the buyer that the product may not be available for shipment to the buyer unless the product is purchased within a specific timeframe.

6. The method of claim 1, wherein the inventory status comprises a number of other buyers considering the product for purchase and the change in the inventory status comprises a change in the number of other buyers considering the product for purchase.

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7. The method of claim 1, wherein said determining comprises examining an entry contained in one or more electronic shopping carts.
8. The method of claim 7, wherein the electronic shopping cart comprises a persistent electronic shopping cart.  
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9. The method of claim 1, wherein said informing the buyer comprises sending a notification message to the buyer using an electronic mail service.
10. 10. The method of claim 1, wherein said informing the buyer comprises sending a notification message to the buyer using an instant messaging service.  
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11. The method of claim 1, wherein said informing the buyer comprises displaying a notification message upon a video display screen viewed by the buyer.
12. The method of claim 11, wherein said displaying the notification message comprises using a dynamic content window formed by a Java applet or an ActiveX control script.  
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13. The method of claim 7, wherein said examining comprises examining the entry stored onto a storage medium of a server.  
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14. The method of claim 7, wherein said determining comprises comparing an inventory quantity of the product to an aggregate quantity of the product contained in the electronic shopping carts.  
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15. The method as recited in claim 14, wherein said comparing comprises generating a first notification quantity value by applying a conversion rate factor to the inventory quantity, and said informing occurs if the value of the aggregate quantity is equal to or greater than the value of the first notification quantity value.

16. The method as recited in claim 15, wherein comparing further comprises generating a second notification quantity value by applying a safety margin factor to the first notification quantity value, and said informing occurs if the value of the aggregate 5 quantity is equal to or greater than the value of the second notification quantity value.

17. The method as recited in claim 1, wherein said informing the buyer comprises selectively informing the buyer based on a ranked profile of the buyer.

10 18. A system for conducting electronic commerce over a network, comprising a server adapted to determine an inventory status of at least one product being considered for purchase by a buyer and further adapted to inform the buyer of a change in the inventory status, wherein said informing the buyer precedes any purchase of the product by the buyer.

15 19. The system of claim 18, wherein said informing comprises informing the buyer that the product may not be available for shipment to the buyer unless the product is purchased within a specific timeframe.

20 20. The system of claim 18, wherein the server is further adapted to compare an inventory quantity of the product to an aggregate quantity of the product currently considered for purchase by all buyers.

25 21. The system of claim 20, wherein the server is further adapted to generate a first notification quantity value by applying a conversion rate factor to the inventory quantity and to generate a second notification quantity value by applying a safety margin factor to the first notification quantity value.

22. The system of claim 21, wherein the server is further adapted to perform said informing the buyer if the value of the aggregate quantity is equal to or greater than either the first or the second notification quantity value.

5 23. The system of claim 22, wherein the server is further adapted to inform the buyer using a communication means selected from the group comprising an electronic mail service, an instant messaging service, and dynamic content window.

10 24. The system of claim 23, wherein the e-commerce server is further adapted to selectively inform the buyer based on a ranked profile of the buyer.

15 25. A system for conducting electronic commerce over a network, said system comprising an electronic commerce server, wherein the electronic commerce server comprises notification instructions stored on one or more storage devices for informing a buyer of a change in inventory status of a product being considered for purchase, wherein said informing precedes any purchase of the product by the buyer.

20 26. The system of claim 25, wherein the notification instructions further comprises instructions for generating a notification quantity value by applying a conversion rate factor to an inventory quantity of the product and performing said informing if the notification quantity value is equal to or greater than an aggregate quantity of the product currently being considered for purchase by all buyers.

25 27. The system of claim 26, wherein the electronic commerce server further comprises one or more databases stored on the storage device, wherein the database comprises notification data including the inventory quantity, the aggregate quantity, the conversion rate factor, and the notification quantity value.

30 28. The system of claim 27, wherein the notification instructions further comprise instructions for selectively informing the buyer based on a ranked profile of the buyer.

29. The system of claim 28, wherein the notification data further comprises data associated with the ranked profile of the buyer.

5 30. The system of claim 25, further comprising a Web server coupled to the electronic commerce server and adapted to interface with one or more network clients, wherein the network clients provide means for one or more buyers to conduct electronic commerce transactions with the electronic commerce server.

10 31. A computer-usable carrier medium comprising:

first program instructions executable on a computational device for determining an inventory status of at least one product being considered for purchase by a buyer; and

15 second program instructions executable on a computational device for informing the buyer of a change in the inventory status, wherein said informing precedes any purchase of the product by the buyer.

20 32. The carrier medium of claim 31, wherein the first program instructions are further executable for determining an inventory quantity of the product and for determining an aggregate quantity of the product currently being considered for purchase by all buyers.

25 33. The carrier medium of claim 32, wherein the first program instructions are further executable for generating a first notification quantity value by applying a conversion rate factor to the inventory quantity and generating a second notification value by applying a safety margin factor to the first notification quantity value.

34. The carrier medium of claim 33, wherein the second program instructions are further executable for informing the buyer if either the first or second notification quantity value is equal to or greater than the aggregate quantity.
- 5 35. The carrier medium of claim 34, wherein the second program instructions are further executable for selectively informing the buyer based on a ranked profile of the buyer.
- 10 36. The carrier medium of claim 35, wherein the second program instructions are further executable for informing the buyer using a communication means selected from the group comprising an electronic mail service, an instant messaging service, and dynamic content window.
- 15 37. The carrier medium of claim 35, wherein the second program instructions are further executable for informing the buyer that the product may not be available for shipment if the product is not purchased within a specific timeframe.